

THEOLOGY

3. Theology, Systematic and Dogmatic Theology and the History of Theology

a. We define theology with L. Berkhof:

"Theology is the effect which the divine revelation embodied in Scripture, produced in the sphere of systematic thought. Theology is the fruit of the reflection of the Church on the truth, revealed in the Word of God."

(L. Berkhof: Recent Trends in Theology, p. 7)

b. Systematic and Dogmatic are adjectives appended to the term theology and as such they are academically interchangeable. This academic science takes the fruits of exegetical and biblical theology and attempts to systematize them into a self-consistent coherent whole. This discipline, believing that Truth is One, attempts to reconstruct out of the Scriptural data, a single system of doctrine which will reflect that conviction.

c. History of Theology is thus a history of the development of systems, or parts of systems, that seek to explain the unified form of doctrine.

4. Dogma and the History of Dogma

DOGMA

a. For Dogma we are rather taken with Berkhof in his definition of the term in the text: The History of Christian Doctrines, p. 21:

"A dogma may be defined as a doctrine, derived from Scripture, officially defined by the Church, and declared to rest upon Divine authority."

Subsequently he offers the characteristics of a dogma:

Characteristics
of Dogma.

(Compare p. 6
and the note
on criteria.)

(1) Subject matter, derived from the Word, is authoritative.

(2) It is the fruit of reflection upon Scripture, not the mere repetition of Scripture phraseology.

(3) It is defined by competent ecclesiastical body.

(4) As the expression of the "community" it has social significance.

(5) It has traditional value, being non-transient, in the sense of service in passing the possessions of the church to coming generations. (spiritual possessions, that is.)